

HISTORIC PRESERVATION



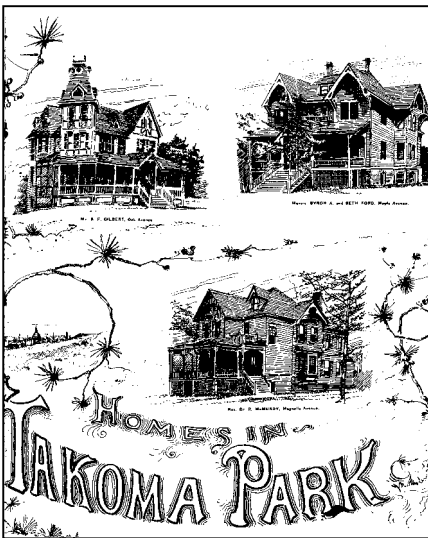
Benjamin Franklin Gilbert, 1841-1907,
founder of Takoma Park

(Source: *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1984)

Any study or plan for revitalization of DC's portion of the greater Takoma community must acknowledge and respect the history of this unique, inter-jurisdictional neighborhood. Takoma, DC is part of a proud and historic transit community and residents expect new development and revitalization efforts to maintain and enhance that character. Therefore, it is important for the Takoma Central District Plan to recognize and respect this rich heritage as an integral part of its revitalization, urban design and marketing strategies and initiatives. The following overview of the greater Takoma community's history and historic district, along with key preservation issues and strategies, is presented to help guide implementation of the plan's other recommendations in terms of this historic context.

A Historic Transit-Oriented Community

From its founding in 1883 by Benjamin Franklin Gilbert as a commuter suburb and resort community centered on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad station, development in Takoma Park has been driven by the area's attraction as a healthful, attractive and convenient place to live. With easy rail access to the employment and business center of Washington, a relatively high (and therefore healthier) elevation, and good sources for clean drinking water, Takoma Park possessed the critical elements for success as the capital city's first true suburb.



1888 B.F. Gilbert real estate brochure
(Source: *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*,
Historic Takoma, Inc., 1984)

The new community straddled the DC/Maryland boundary on the B & O's Metropolitan Branch, which had opened in 1873. Initial growth in Takoma Park focused on residential development. Gilbert platted streets and subdivided the community into large lots for single-family homes. In 1884 Isaac Thomas opened Takoma Park's first store, initiating the community's tradition of neighborhood-serving businesses.

In 1886 a new railroad station was completed and the first church and public school arrived in 1888. By this time Takoma Park's fledgling business community around the train station included two general stores, a drug store, a carriage factory, coal and wood yards, and a blacksmith shop. Civic activism received a boost with the organization of the Takoma Park Citizens Association. The Maryland portion of the community was incorporated as a town in 1890, with Gilbert serving as the town's first mayor. In 1893 Gilbert completed his vision for the community with construction of a large resort hotel in North Takoma.

Although Gilbert subsequently suffered serious personal financial setbacks, the Takoma Park community continued to develop into the 20th



View west towards Cedar St. underpass and B & O station, 1918
(Source: *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1984)

century. In the 1890's, a volunteer fire department was organized, new commercial, community and church buildings were erected, a water and sewage system was constructed, and streetcar service was established into downtown Washington, further enhancing the community's accessibility. The District of Columbia's first branch library opened at 5th and Cedar Streets in 1911, erected with a \$40,000 donation from Andrew Carnegie. Takoma Park's early Victorian homes were followed by Arts and Crafts, Bungalow, Classical and Colonial Revival style residences on smaller lots. The area around the railroad station area changed considerably with the construction of the Cedar St. underpass in 1912.

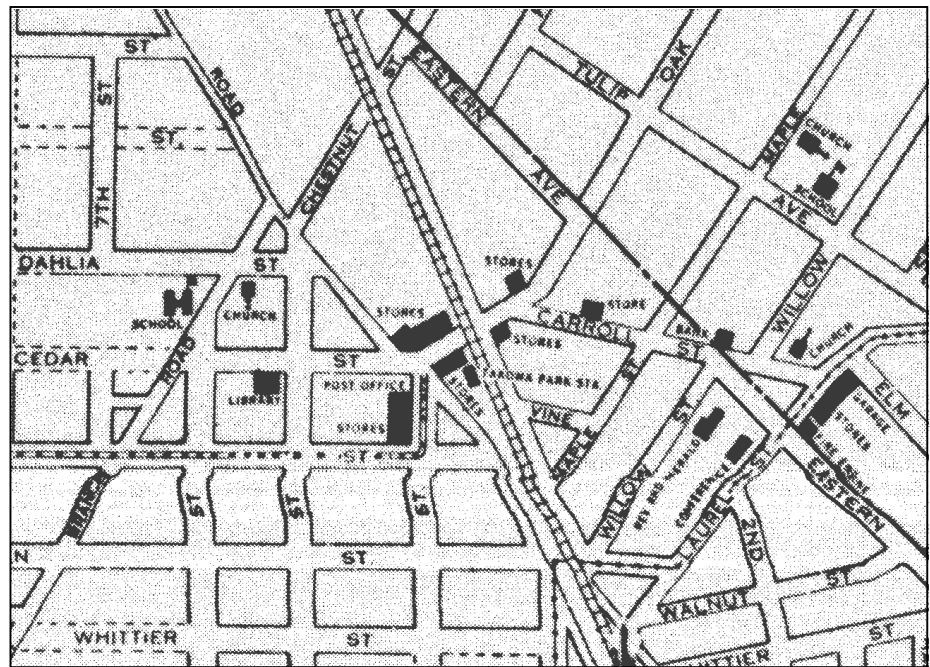


Takoma Hall, just east of railroad tracks, after 1912 construction of Cedar St. underpass
(Source: *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1984)

By the early 1920's the community had developed two somewhat distinct commercial nodes linked by Cedar and Carroll Streets – the original business district located adjacent to the B & O station in DC and a separate Maryland district at the intersection of Carroll and Laurel Streets (see [Figure B](#)). The DC side saw modern entertainment arrive with the Takoma Theatre at 4th and Butternut Streets in 1923.

Figure B

Map of Takoma Park showing business and community buildings, 1922



(Source: *Takoma Park, Portrait of a Victorian Suburb*, Historic Takoma, Inc., 1984)

Although differences between Takoma Park's DC and Maryland sections became more defined in the 20th century, the community retained its historic identity, with both jurisdictions celebrating anniversaries of their 1883 founding together in 1933, 1958 and 1983. A difficult but ultimately successful fight to prevent extension of the proposed ten-lane North Central Freeway project through the community also saw



Takoma Theatre, 4th & Butternut Streets

residents from both jurisdictions working effectively together from 1964 to 1970.

With the opening of the Takoma Metrorail station in 1978, Takoma Park came full circle to its historic origins. With Metrorail's Red Line and Metro buses replacing B & O steam trains as the primary means of conveyance, Takoma Park could once again prosper as an historic rail and transit oriented community.

Beginning in the 1970's, increased interest in historic preservation by old and new residents led to the renovation of many historic but neglected homes. Local and National Register historic districts were established in Takoma Park, Maryland in the 1970's and in Takoma, DC in the 1980's. Historic Takoma, Inc., organized in 1978 to promote historic preservation and community education and improvement, became an active and involved voice for Takoma Park's heritage.

Today, the rich, inter-jurisdictional nature of Takoma's cultural and architectural heritage is a critical aspect of life in the community and continues to frame the priorities and vision of the neighborhood's residents into the 21st century.

DC's Takoma Park Historic District

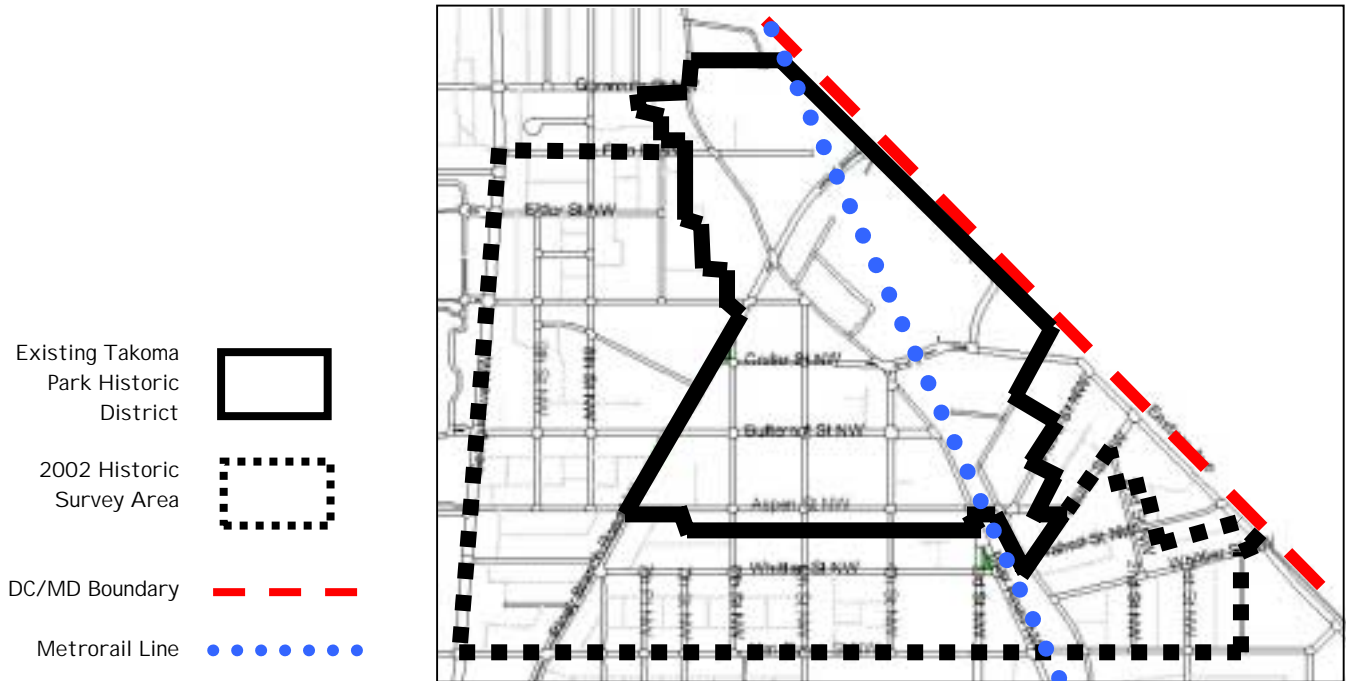
The District of Columbia's Takoma Park Historic District, named to reflect Takoma, DC's heritage as part of the original village of Takoma Park, was designated by the city in November 1980, with listing on the National Register in June 1983. Under the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act, all new development and exterior alterations to existing structures within the Takoma Park Historic District must be reviewed and approved by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board. The district contains approximately 160 contributing buildings dating from 1883 to 1940, and is generally bounded by Aspen Street on the south, Piney Branch Road and 7th Street on the west and Eastern Avenue on the northeast (see [Figure C](#)).

In 2002, the DC Office of Planning's Historic Preservation Division and Historic Takoma, Inc. are jointly funding and conducting a historic survey of properties within the traditional Takoma, DC community that are not already included in the original historic district. An estimated 1000 properties are located in the survey area, which extends from the existing district west to Georgia Avenue and south to Van Buren Street (also see [Figure C](#)). About 80-100 of these will be selected for more detailed study, and approximately 40 properties will be documented and photographed to the standards of the National Register of Historic

Places. This survey may lead to eventual expansion of the Takoma Park Historic District and protection of additional historic resources.

Figure C

Takoma Park Historic District & 2002 Survey Area



The entire Takoma Central District Plan area is located within the Takoma Park Historic District boundaries, with the exception of the CVS site on Carroll Ave. and the more modern structures between Willow and Laurel Streets. Therefore, in addition to required zoning and permitting approvals, virtually all new construction and renovation of existing buildings in the plan area is subject to review and approval by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board. This review process will be a critical tool for ensuring that projects resulting from implementation of the plan's revitalization ideas, strategies and scenarios will be assessed for their compatibility with the community's historic character.

Key Historic Preservation Issues

Although Takoma's citizens are proud of their success in preserving and promoting the community's history and architectural heritage, participants in the planning process identified a number of historic preservation issues in need of attention within and around the plan area:

- Poorly maintained and deteriorating historic resources within DC's Takoma Park Historic District.
- Lack of citizen understanding of historic district designation and review processes.

- Lack of residential property tax credits for renovation of owner-occupied historic residential properties.
- Poor identification and marketing of the historic district.
- Need for better use of historic character to enhance economic development.
- Need for better inter-jurisdictional coordination on historic preservation issues.

Historic Preservation Revitalization Strategies

To address the issues identified by Takoma's citizens, the plan proposes basic strategies for preserving and enhancing the existing historic structures and character of the community and integrating historic preservation activities with revitalization efforts. Many of the strategies will require leadership from local residents and property owners. The strategies focus on specific actions related to historic resources; however, other strategies included elsewhere in the plan should also be implemented with Takoma's historic fabric as a guiding principle. Key historic preservation strategies include:

1. **Recognize and respect Takoma's rich heritage as an integral part of all revitalization, urban design and marketing strategies and initiatives.**
2. **Preserve existing historic resources by completing a neighborhood property survey to investigate the historic potential of areas and individual properties surrounding the existing historic district (*a one year survey is funded for 2002 as a partnership between DC Office of Planning's Historic Preservation Division and Historic Takoma, Inc.*)**
3. **Promote availability of Federal historic preservation tax credit program for certified rehabilitation projects and initiate legislative action to provide property tax credits for renovation of owner-occupied residential properties in the Takoma Park Historic District.**
4. **Update design guidelines (Kresscox/Sulton Campbell, 1986) for the Historic District to better reflect today's market conditions and rehabilitation techniques.**
5. **Improve signage for DC's Takoma Park Historic District, coordinated with the adjacent historic district in Takoma Park, Maryland.**

6. Develop and market a joint DC/MD historic walking tour in coordination with other historic preservation and cultural heritage programs (such as DC Heritage Tourism Council).
7. To enhance economic development in the area, develop and implement a marketing plan that emphasizes the historic charm, cultural heritage and history of the Takoma Park community.